

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA  
Case No.: 22-CR-80173-AMC-3**

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**Plaintiff,**

v.

**MATTHEW BRANDEN GARRELL**

**Defendant.**

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**DEFENDANT'S NOTICE OF FILING LETTERS OF SUPPORT**

Defendant, Matthew Brandon Garrell, by and through undersigned counsel, files the attached six (6) character reference letters for this Court's consideration at the sentencing hearing of Mr. Garrell.

Respectfully submitted,

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on August 18, 2023, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court by using the CM/ECF system which will send a notice of electronic filing to all counsel of record.

s/Alek Ubieta  
ALEK UBIETA, ESQ.

## EXHIBIT 1

### CHARACTER LETTERS FROM:

1. Mary B. Smith, family friend
2. L. Chris Benson, family friend
3. William Y. Yinger, family friend
4. Donald Keefer, family friend
5. Travis Garrell, brother of Mr. Garrell
6. Karen Garrell, mother of Mr. Garrell

Honorable Judge Cannon,

My name is Mary Smith, and I am a close family friend of Matthew Garrell. Matthew and his family are such close friends with my family that we consider them a part of our family. I have always conversationally referred to Matthew and his brother as my cousins and Matthew's parents as my aunt and uncle. I am writing to share a few stories about Matthew and the impact his family has had on my life.

When I was starting high school, Matthew's dad retired from the Navy and was hired by the same company where my dad worked, and where they still both work today. During this time of transition, the Garrell family moved into our house with my family and lived with us for a couple of years. My family is a family of 7, so there were 11 of us under one roof! The Garrell family have always been sacrificial givers, and when they came to live with us, we were blessed to be able to reciprocate some of the blessings they provided to us over the years. Those were challenging years, but I still cherish the memories of our families blending to become one giant family.

Matthew and I are just a few months apart in age, so we have many pictures and fond memories of us growing up together. I remember going to Fort Bragg, NC to go visit Matthew's grandmother with his uncles and their families. One particular visit I remember, we had a big cookout, set up a kiddie pool in the yard and had a water hose fight. I also remember going to visit Matthew's uncle in Charlotte, NC and celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with them where they always had lots of fireworks that everyone set off up and down the street. These are precious memories. When we were in high school, we participated in charity work together such as Habitat for Humanity and Adopt a Highway. We were close friends and always hung out and talked about everything.

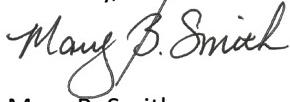
More recently, when my oldest son became interested in Pokémon cards, Matthew gave him all of the cards that he had collected throughout his childhood. I remember these being prized possessions when we were growing up, so I was so grateful that he was willing to just give them away. My oldest was so appreciative and cherishes them like Matthew did at that same age.

When we went to college, we both chose to attend NC State University where we had a few classes together. Around this time during our first year in college, our paths began to diverge. I was blessed to quickly meet the man that would become my future husband, and we both were members of the Marching Band, Pep Band and Wind Ensemble. This created an instant social group that was very close and we spent all our spare time together. Matthew wasn't able to find a social group where he felt he could fit in. Our majors were different, so once our first year was done, we didn't have an opportunity to have classes together anymore. Looking back on this time, I wish that I had reached out to Matthew more and made sure that we stayed close.

I am aware of the serious charges that Matthew is facing and was genuinely shocked to receive the news. I know that Matthew was raised in a Christian household and knows that God can heal our hearts and forgive all sins. I am praying that Matthew turns back to God and asks for forgiveness for his actions. I humbly ask for mercy for Matthew and I know that with the support of his family, he can find a way to reconciliation.

Thank you for reading and taking the time to learn more about Matthew.

Sincerely,



Mary B. Smith

May 28, 2023  
The Honorable Judge Cannon  
Federal Courthouse  
Ft. Pierce, FL

Your Honor:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Matthew Garrell who is currently incarcerated in the St. Lucie County Jail. Matthew has pled guilty to the charges made against him and he is awaiting sentencing later this year. I am the father of five children. I understand the gravity of these charges and the impact of this behavior on our society in general. My hope in this letter is to share a perspective on Matthew that provides a holistic view of him as a person. I have read the other character letters written on Matthew's behalf and will attempt to provide some supplementary information here.

My family and I have had a close personal friendship with Matthew and his family since before Matthew was born. Matthew's mother Karen was the matron of honor at our wedding. My daughter Mary has been Matthew's friend since birth. In 1999, Matthew's father retired from the US Navy as a Chief Petty Officer. For the next two years, the Garrell family shared our home in Raleigh NC while they paid off debt and prepared to buy a home of their own. The living situation of four adults and seven children in a single-family home was cozy, but also afforded me an excellent view of Matthew and his family when they were out of the public view.

Much of my close personal interaction with Matthew was during his high school years. He was living at our home and there were many opportunities to talk while driving to school, extracurricular activities, and special events. I always found Matthew to be thoughtful and intelligent with a dry wit that would verbally keep you on your toes. Matthew did well academically and engaged in academic, religious, and service based extra curriculars. Matthew has always been an honest and straightforward person that rarely found himself in trouble or at the center of controversy. He had no legal encounters and very few school administration challenges. He was a great kid. Even after the events of recent months, I would trust Matthew implicitly with my family's personal or financial details if the need arose.

After high school, Matthew attended NC State with a major of Psychology. While attending the school he was looking for a job to pay for his expenses. At significant risk to my career, I recommended Matthew for a technical documentation job at the firm where I worked (Tekelec/Oracle). Matthew started off as a co-operative education student and eventually transitioned to a full-time employee in this capacity. Based on my interactions with Matthew at the time, I had no reservations in recommending Matthew for this position. He rewarded this trust with excellent performance and an outstanding work ethic. In all of the years that he performed this job, Matthew never received a performance appraisal that was below "Exceeds Expectations". He has always been appreciated in his professional job environment and seen as a critical resource in a critical function. Matthew has used a significant portion of his salary to

pay off his college loans. He has taken responsibility for the money he borrowed to invest in his future.

Meaningful social interactions have never come easily for Matthew. He has always had few close friends or associates. He had some relationship experiences in graduate school that did not work out the way that he planned. This led to more isolation. Matthew moved away from his nuclear family for some great opportunities at graduate school at Lipscomb College in Nashville and again for work with Equifax in Atlanta. This led to a weakening of relationships with his family and a strengthening of relationships with others in Anime and online communities with different value systems. I think this progression contributes significantly to his current situation. Upon his release, my family and I will establish and maintain new relationships with Matthew that provide assistance, encouragement, and accountability.

Over the last few months, I have seen behavioral and attitude changes in Matthew. I believe that he understands that his actions have damaged society and himself. I also believe that he regrets these actions and intends to reform and reenter society as a contributing member when allowed. As we have for the last 36 years, my family and I will stand with Matthew on that day and do everything we can to assist with his re-integration to society. As we are in our fifties and sixties, we respectfully ask for a sentence that will allow us to perform this service in our lifetimes.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,



L. Chris Benson  
VP Cloud Development, Oracle Inc.

May 10, 2023

The Honorable Judge Cannon  
Federal Courthouse  
Ft. Pierce, FL

Your Honor:

I am writing to you on behalf of Matthew Garrell, who is currently in custody in the St. Lucie County Jail (booking number 273445) and awaiting sentencing later this year.

I am aware of the charges to which Matthew pled guilty and fully acknowledge their seriousness. My intent is to offer some background and perspective from someone who has known Matt and his family for over twenty years, with the hope that it will help the court in assessing the likelihood of his reform and the extent of the support network that will aid and encourage him in that direction in the years ahead.

To summarize briefly, my association with Matthew and his family began in 2002 when my family and the Garrell family both moved to the Raleigh, North Carolina area. Our families met at the same church where we are both still members in Raleigh. We quickly developed a friendship that has continued through the years. My son is close in age to both Matthew and his brother, Travis and they developed a close friendship through activities in the church (bible classes, youth activities, service projects, bible bowl competitions) and elsewhere.

In addition, I have developed a close friendship with his father in our over twenty-year association which continues to the present. Our sons all attended North Carolina State University and, in fact my son boarded with the Garrell family during his freshman year.

My overall perception of Matthew's character has always been high. I have known him to be intelligent, deeply thinking, well spoken, honest and trustworthy. I think he has struggled some with social interactions and that has possibly been a contributing factor in his current circumstances. That said, I believe that he fully understands the seriousness of the charges against him and fully intends to turn his life around at this point. My intent and my pledge is that I will do everything in my power both now and in the future to support Matthew and his family in encouraging and moving him toward complete reform and restoration of his life.

I would simply and humbly ask the court to consider the high likelihood of genuine repentance/reform and the existence of a strong support network to encourage that reform when determining an appropriate length of incarceration.

Sincerely,

*William L. Yinger*

William L. Yinger  
[wlyinger@gmail.com](mailto:wlyinger@gmail.com)  
(919.616.6713)

May 10, 2023

Subject: Matthew Garrell Character Letter

Honorable Judge Cannon, my name is Donald Keefer and I writing this letter to help you form a more complete picture of Matthew Garrell as I knew him. I am aware of and saddened by the charges against him.

I am an elder at the church of his youth – the North Raleigh Church of Christ. I taught the Sunday School class he attended in high school and his early college years before he left Raleigh. In those classes, I remember that he possessed remarkable wisdom for his age and an ability to express himself clearly and with confidence. There is no doubt that he knew the scriptures that we were discussing and applied them to himself. I remember also that he volunteered to help with a construction project I was leading in the church garden – he and his brother, Travis were the only youth to help.

What made the greatest impression on me, though, was a mission trip to Honduras that Matthew participated in with my daughter and other youth group members. I was one of the adult members of the group and acted as his chaperone. Matthew participated gladly in all the activities we were undertaking (building single room houses, distributing food). But what impressed me most about Matthew was how affected he was by the extreme poverty he witnessed. Matthew always seemed to have a hard shell to protect his emotions, but in this one instance, I saw a tender heart that was genuinely empathetic to the Hondurans as he expressed how glad he was to be able to experience this and assist them.

I hope this helps you understand Matthew more completely.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Keefer

1004 Enderbury Drive

Raleigh, NC 27614

Your Honorable Judge Canon,

Thank you for your consideration of these letters from Matthew's friends and family. My name is Travis Garrell, Matthew's younger brother by three years. I acknowledge the grave circumstances leading me to write this letter to you, and pray for your consideration and wise judgement. I have a couple of unique perspectives on my brother that perhaps others might not.

While I have uncounted memories with Matthew from my younger days as you might expect, the one that stands out most prominently is from when I was in sixth grade, and is the day my brother saved my life. My father had just gotten out of the military, and we had moved to North Carolina. In those short months, I went to two different schools for sixth grade. Needless to say I did not have any friends at the time. I was quiet and shy, and did not take to friends immediately, which led to a large amount of bullying. Such were the thoughts of a downtrodden eleven year old that I contemplated suicide. I had snuck a kitchen knife upstairs to my room without anyone noticing. I happened to talk to Matthew that night, late after everyone had gone to bed. It was emotional for me, as I confessed my fears and thoughts to him. He told me about the story behind an old hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" by Horatio Spafford. The hymn was written shortly after Spafford had lost everything he held dear, including his son, four daughters, and his business ventures destroyed. Despite all of this, he was still able to write the words "Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know It is well with my soul". My brother sang this song with me that night, and I believe that it saved my life. This has become a core guidance to me in my adult life: "It is well, it is well, with my soul".

On a lighter note, I give credit to my brother as well for helping me into my professional career today. I was visiting him in Nashville while he attended graduate school there. We spent a week together that summer relaxing and enjoying each others company. He took me to see the Parthenon in Nashville, where we could share our mutual love of history and mythology. He also took time to teach me the basics of technical writing, and show me the "tools of the trade" so to speak. My brother is an excellent writer and had been working as a technical writer for a couple of years at that point. Based on his instruction and guidance, I was able to confidently interview for a similar position just a few months later, and I ultimately got the job. I was able to begin working as a technical writer myself, which would later afford me the opportunity to transition into my current role as a Security Engineer, where I have found great success.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Matthew for all that he has done for me in my life. These are but two short examples of the impact he's had on his little brother, if I had opportunity, I could list many more. I stand ready upon his release to help Matthew and provide support and guidance to him, as he did to me. I would like to close with these simple words from the Bible, in the book of Ephesians, chapter two verses four and five: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, has made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you are saved)". Thank you again for your consideration, God bless you.

Travis Garrell

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Travis Garrell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Travis" on top and "Garrell" on the bottom, slightly overlapping.

Your Honorable Judge Cannon,

My name is Karen Garrell, and I come before you as a devastated and heartbroken mother. I understand the great seriousness of my son Matthew's charges. As I do believe he also understands them and is very remorseful for his actions.

Matthew grew up in a military family, as did both his parents. I, like both my sons, hated moving and being the new kid. Matthew went to 11 different schools growing up, including changing high schools three times. Friendships and long-lasting bonds are hard to make and keep strong in the best of circumstances. Matthew, while being the introverted new kid, had trouble overcoming these challenges. He has always been an extremely bright son, and thrived on the academic part of school, relating to his teachers more than peers. Unfortunately, he and his brother were frequently bullied and harassed to the point where I needed to take them back and forth to school as opposed to them riding the bus.

His father's 20 years of service to our country took him away for long stretches of his life. I tried my best acting as a single parent, to see that both he and his brother got to do many activities, hoping it would help them constantly adjust to new places and new schools. They participated in sports and volunteer activities in church and at school. Matthew even went on a mission trip to Honduras and was able to use his Spanish language skills to act as a translator for the group. After graduating from High School, these service opportunities seemed to taper off.

To help with the cost of college, Matthew worked part time and lived at home as he started his collegiate career. He majored in psychology - I think to try and figure himself out and where he fit in life, and maybe even be able to better engage socially. He carried significant academic workloads in undergraduate studies. During this time, we noticed bouts of depression and disengagement from things he was previously involved in. It was at this time he began his first counseling sessions for depression supplemented by medication.

He seemed to be doing better after graduating from North Carolina State University with a B.S. in Psychology (Summa Cum Laude). He decided to pursue a masters in clinical psychology and selected Lipscomb University in Nashville, TN for graduate school. It was his first time living away from home. While there he excelled academically, though he continued to struggle with close interpersonal relationship.

In his final year there, he had his first significant relationship - even to the point of discussing marriage. Sadly, the young lady's father passed away. From that point on, the mother and grandmother were scared of their daughter moving away from them after Matthew graduating. They began to apply significant pressure involving money and cars. This led to a break up without any sort of communication - no calls, text, or emails. With that, Matthew became greatly depressed after the break up. With only his thesis work remaining, he left school, returned home, and continued his full-time work as a technical writer for Teklec / Oracle.

When the technical writing work was shifted overseas, Matthew sought new employment. This led him to taking a position at Equifax in Atlanta, a month before the announcement of the major security breach of 100 million user accounts being hacked. Following that announcement, Equifax became a very toxic work environment affecting Matthew and leading into another

season of depression and anxiety. Again, Matthew proactively checked himself into a local hospital for panic attacks and severe anxiety. He was given medication and encouraged to seek counseling.

Following this he was placed on short term disability. While on short term disability, he received counseling along with moving back home for support. Over the course of the next couple of months, technical writing work was again shifted to overseas, resulting in Matthew being laid off. Despite Matthew struggling with depression, he quickly obtained a job at Red Hat. He worked in their corporate office in Raleigh, first as a contractor, and later as a full-time employee working on their flagship cloud product. This allowed Matthew to once again live on his own.

Unfortunately, this also coincided with Covid impacting all our lives and working from home further limited Matthew's ability to interact with professional peers, family, and friends.

Last year, recruiters who had placed Matthew at Red Hat, engaged Matthew to move to Hashi Corp as a technical writer. He took on a new role as technical writer / knowledge manager. Within a couple of months of Matthew's arrival, all other experienced technical writers left the company, leaving him as the sole writer with very limited product experience. This led him to once again have panic attacks, anxiety, and not sleeping. He was again placed on short term disability at which time his arrest took place.

We believe that the depression, anxiety, massive sleeplessness, stress from Covid isolation, his maternal grandmother dying in isolation in 2021 and his paternal grandmother dying in 2022 resulted in significant alterations in his cognitive and emotional responses. This all contributed to him making very poor choices resulting in his incarceration. I am not trying to justify his actions, merely giving insight to a mind that was not thinking clearly or correctly.

We believe justice is needed and we hope that while incarcerated he can also obtain psychological counseling, he needs to address this unacceptable line of thinking. We believe he can be rehabilitated, and can become a contributing member of society. His family and friends stand ready to support and encourage him now and in the future.

It is my fervent prayer for justice, tempered with grace and mercy can be found in this process. That God may grant us wisdom and insight.

Best regards,

Karen Garrell